

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
 INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES GIBSON ON ABC-TV PROGRAM, "GOOD MORNING AMERICA"
 PENTAGON
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And the big question, of course, is what Saddam Hussein is planning, so we spoke just a few moments before we went on the air with Defense Secretary William Perry in Washington.

(Begin videotaped segment)

Mr. Secretary, how many U.S. troops are now committed to going to the Middle East?

SEC. PERRY: About 28,000 ground troops, Charlie.

MR. GIBSON: And how many more could be going?

SEC. PERRY: Well, we have alerted two other divisions beyond that. Have not yet committed to send any of those divisions.

MR. GIBSON: And how soon will the first troops be in position?

SEC. PERRY: There are already troops in position, both in Kuwait and in Saudi Arabia. The bulk of them, though, are still on the way.

MR. GIBSON: You have said over the weekend that Iraq could be in a position to attack by late this week. Correct?

SEC. PERRY: It could be. It would be not a strong position for them, but they would have at least two of these Republican Guard divisions presumably in place by that time.

MR. GIBSON: Because the question in people's minds is how vulnerable are the first U.S. troops, the early deployment? How vulnerable are they?

SEC. PERRY: In order to determine vulnerability, you look not only at the ground troops, but also at the air and the naval forces that are there. We will have, by the end of the day today, over 200 tactical aircraft in the region, and that is a very powerful air force.

In addition to that, we will have a carrier battle group, which will include, besides the carrier itself, four major warships and including a large number of Tomahawk land attack missiles, in addition to the F-14s and F-18 fighter aircraft.

MR. GIBSON: So we have enough armament in place, enough air strength in place, to stop them?

SEC. PERRY: I would certainly not want to attack the force which we are assembling there. It's going to be a powerful, powerful military force.

MR. GIBSON: But do we have enough to stop them?

SEC. PERRY: We have enough either there or on the way there to readily defeat any force which the Iraqis can put up.

CHARLES GIBSON: As Mort was telling you, the big military buildup is under way in the Persian Gulf, U.S. officials saying Iraq has moved as many as 70,000 troops toward its border with Kuwait, and Washington is responding by sending thousands of American troops to the area to prevent any possible invasion of Kuwait.

MR. GIBSON: Even if they were to attack as early as possible, late this week, possibly early next?

SEC. PERRY: If they were to attack early, they have at least as many disadvantages from an early attack as we have. The time is not on their side.

MR. GIBSON: Secretary of State Christopher said yesterday they would pay an horrendous price were they to attack. You want to define that?

SEC. PERRY: No, I don't want to define that, but I would not argue with that term at all. I think it's a descriptive. And Iraq -- people in the Iraq government should reflect on the price that they paid the last time and should have learned a very important lesson from that.

MR. GIBSON: Mr. Secretary, all weekend long, ever since we became aware on Friday of what was happening, people have struggled with the question of why? Why is Saddam Hussein up to? Why is he doing this? Do you have any better sense now after all this time?

SEC. PERRY: It's very difficult for me to understand, Charlie. You would have thought, as I said, that he would have learned a lesson from the last time. It may be that he believes that we are distracted with our military operations in Haiti now. If he believes that, that's a very grave mistake. The forces we have in Haiti are relatively small compared to our total forces. The forces that we are deploying or have alerted to deploy are not involved with the Haiti operation and are more than adequate to totally defeat the Iraqi army.

MR. GIBSON: Do you have a sense that it might be because of domestic political concerns inside Iraq?

SEC. PERRY: I do know that they're having terrible political problems, as well as economic problems, in Iraq. This may be in order to distract attention from those problems, but it's a very high price to pay for a political or economic move of that sort.

MR. GIBSON: Do you expect him to come in, or do you think this is a feint?

SEC. PERRY: I just cannot forecast what is in his mind. It's a -- what he has done to date does not make any sense, and therefore it is hard to extrapolate forward from that.

MR. GIBSON: Those troops that we are sending there, they are prepared to stay as long as Iraq keeps its forces on the border of Kuwait?

SEC. PERRY: I have no desire to keep a large military force there for a long time, so, no, we do not plan to keep them there. We want to resolve this crisis.

MR. GIBSON: No, but I'm saying they would stay there as long as Iraq keeps troops in this kind of number on the border.

SEC. PERRY: They will stay there as long as necessary to deter an attack on Kuwait.

MR. GIBSON: Mr. Secretary, let me change just briefly to the situation in Haiti. You met with General Cedras over the weekend. Do you expect him and General Biamby to step down today?

SEC. PERRY: I do expect them to step down today, yes.

MR. GIBSON: And what change will that make in the next few days in Haiti?

SEC. PERRY: Well, it will allow the transition to move forward, transition to the new government. New ministers will be appointed and put in place so that the government will be already established by the time President Aristide arrives there at the end of the week.

MR. GIBSON: Did he tell you when you met with him over the weekend that he would be stepping down today, and did he tell you whether he would leave the country or not?

SEC. PERRY: He told me he would be stepping down soon and that he would be leaving the country.

MR. GIBSON: So you expect him out of Haiti this week?

SEC. PERRY: I do.

MR. GIBSON: Mr. Secretary, I appreciate talking to you. Thanks for being here.

SEC. PERRY: Nice to talk to you, Charlie.
(End videotaped segment)

MR. GIBSON: And "Good Morning America" will continue. Stay with us.